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Jan Noordegraaf

## On Analogy, or Humboldt's Dutch Connexion<sup>1</sup>

Gauß, der zuvor nicht zugehört hatte, bat den Diplomaten, seinen Namen zu wiederholen.  
Der Diplomat tat es mit einer Verneigung. Er sei übrigens auch Forscher!  
Neugierig beugte Gauß sich vor.  
Er untersuche alte Sprachen.  
Ach so, sagte Gauß.  
Das, sagte der Diplomat, habe enttauscht geklungen.  
Sprachwissenschaft. Gauß wiegte den Kopf. Er wolle ja keinem zu nahe treten.

Daniel Kehlman, *Die Vermessung der Welt* (2005)

### 1. Introduction

“Man kann es als einen festen Grundsatz annehmen, dass Alles in einer Sprache auf Analogie beruht”. This quote from Wilhelm von Humboldt introduces Itkonen's recent book on *Analogy as structure and process* (Itkonen 2005: v). This is entirely reasonable, since it is well known that analogy is a basic concept in Humboldt's linguistic theory (cf. Di Cesare 1989: 68).

In the following brief note I would like to point to a neglected aspect of the *provenance* of Humboldt's idea of analogy. As it happens, ‘analogy’ is also a [178] key term in the linguistic theory of the eighteenth-century Dutch Schola Hemsterhusiana, and I shall argue that Humboldt, like many of his contemporaries, was well acquainted with the writings of this school.

### 2. The Schola Hemsterhusiana

When the famous German book collector Zacharias Conrad von Uffenbach (1683-1734) stayed in Amsterdam in the chilly months of February and March 1711, he also called upon Tiberius Hemsterhuis (1685-1766), whom he believed to be a “sehr höflicher Mann”, but with whom he was “bald [...] fertig”, since the young Amsterdam professor “weiter nichts als seine Critic wußte” (Uffenbach 1754: 594). Uffenbach could not know that his interlocutor

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was to become “the greatest Greek scholar of his time” (Lord Monboddo), and the founding father of the ‘Schola Hemsterhusiana’, a group of Dutch scholars, with an international reputation for its etymological method of investigating language, based on principles of reconstruction. These scholars also launched several initiatives to improve Dutch usage, while challenging the overvaluation of Latin. They also gave the first academic courses on Dutch in the eighteenth century. Around the middle of the nineteenth century, however, several harsh German critics such as Jacob Grimm (1785-1863), A.F. Pott (1802-1887), and Theodor Benfey (1809-1881), tried to permanently relegate the Schola’s work to the scrap heap of linguistics,<sup>2</sup> though not quite deservedly (cf. Stankiewicz 1974: 170). The German scholars mainly took offence at the ‘esoteric’ “*Wortgrübeleien*” of the “Schola Lennepio-Scheidiana”, ignoring what comparative historical grammar, the dominant paradigm in nineteenth-century linguistics, had in common with eighteenth-century Dutch classical scholarship.<sup>3</sup>

In the field of linguistics proper neither Tiberius Hemsterhuis nor his most renowned students, Lodewijk Caspar Valckenaer (1715-1785) and Johannes Daniel van Lennep (1724-1771), published a great deal. Although their lecture notes on linguistics had circulated for many years among interested students and colleagues, both within the Netherlands and abroad, it was only in 1790 that Everardus Scheidius (1742-1794) edited Lennep’s voluminous *Etymologicum linguae Graecae* (1808<sup>2</sup>, 1820<sup>3</sup>). In the same year Scheidius published [179] Valckenaer’s and Lennep’s lecture notes in one volume as *L.C. Valckenaerii Observationes academicae, quibus via munitur ad origines Graecas investigandas, lexicorumque defectus resarciendos; et Io. Dan. a Lennep praelectiones academiae, de analogia linguae Graecae, sive rationum analogicarum linguae Graecae expositio*. Scheidius, “the erudite scholar”, as Sir William Jones once called him, justified this edition by the fact that both Valckenaer’s and Lennep’s lectures had been copied and recopied. These unauthorized copies had turned up in France, Germany, and even Transylvania. Moreover, in London a spurious edition had been published in 1778 by someone who hardly knew Latin.<sup>4</sup>

The 1790 edition was first reprinted in 1805 – the book had sold better “quam hodie solent libri Latine scripti”, as the publisher proudly announced (cf. Gerretzen 1940: 322 n.3) – and it was reprinted in London in 1820. Valckenaer’s *Observationes* were also included in his two-volume *Opuscula philologica, critica, oratoria* (Leipzig 1808-1809). But Hemsterhuis’ unpublished and undated *Lectio publica de originibus linguae graecae* (1740?) had not been as ‘vulgata’ as the lecture notes of his students. Edited by the Frisian linguist J.H. Halbertsma (1789-1869), the *Lectio* appeared only in 1845. Jacob Grimm was presented with a free copy, but Halbertsma’s gesture did not help to salvage the reputation of the Schola Hemsterhusiana. In 1866, however, when Michel Bréal (1832-1915) published his French translation of the first volume of Franz Bopp’s (1791-1867) *Vergleichende Grammatik*, he still referred to the Schola: “il n’y avait pas longtemps que l’école hollandaise, représentée

<sup>2</sup> Cf. for example, Max Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion* (New ed., London: Longmans, Green & Co. 1893 [1870<sup>1</sup>], 17): “I feel certain that the time will come when all that is now written on theology, whether from an ecclesiastical or philosophical point of view, will seem as antiquated, as strange, as unaccountable as the works of Vossius, Hemsterhuys, Valckenaer, and Lennep, by the side of Bopp’s Comparative Grammar”.

<sup>3</sup> For more detailed information on the professional vicissitudes of the Schola Hemsterhusiana, see my earlier studies mentioned in the reference section.

<sup>4</sup> “ab homine minime Latine, nedum Graece, docto: quod patet ex copia errorum vitiorumque scriptionis”, as Wytttenbach remarked in 1779 (cf. Noordegraaf 1996b: 219).

par Hemsterhuys, Valckenaer, Lennep et Scheide avait essayé de renouveler l'étude de la langue grecque" (Bréal 1866: xxviii).

The writings of the Schola were composed in Latin, and as such they could be read without any problem by their European colleagues, as well as by Wilhelm von Humboldt, a German who was very interested in classical Greek.

### 3. Humboldt and the Schola Hemsterhusiana

Was Wilhelm von Humboldt aware of or even acquainted with the writings of the Schola Hemsterhusiana? I believe this was indeed the case, and to support this, I will provide some evidence.

**3.1.** In August 1796, when travelling in the Northern part of Germany, Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835) visited the German poet and well-known [180] translator of Homer, Johann Heinrich Voss (1751-1826). In his *Reisetagebuch* Humboldt noted:

Hofrath Voss. – Ich sprach ihn überaus viel und fand ihn in hohem Grade interessant. Obgleich nur sehr wenige Sachen ihn so berühren, dass er über sie redet, und obgleich er alles mit Stillschweigen übergeht, in das er nicht eigentlich eingedrungen ist, so spricht er doch über die eigentlichen Gegenstände seines Studirens sehr gut, raisonirend, und allgemein. Das Gespräch auf einzelne Stellen in Schriftstellern zu lenken, oder sich auf Grammatik oder eigentliche Philologie einzulassen ist schlechterdings nicht seine Art, er verachtet, wie es scheint, allen eigentlichen gelehrten Kram (Humboldt 1981: 28).

It can also be concluded that Voss was deeply involved in the study of language, for in his notes Humboldt remarked:

Den eigentlichen und ursprünglichen Bedeutungen der Wörter scheint er durch tiefe Sprachforschungen eifrig nachzugehen. Er bedient sich ungefähr der *Lennepschen Methode*, doch in andrer Art (Humboldt 1981: 30; emphasis added).

In 1796 it was clear to Humboldt what was meant by the "Lennepschen Methode". It is not surprising that with respect to this passage the editors of Humboldt's *Kleine Schriften* refer to Lennep's inaugural lecture of 1752, *De linguarum analogia, ex analogicis mentis actionibus probata* (a lecture which shows that van Lennep was a clear and eloquent advocate of a mentalist approach), and to the 1790 edition of his lecture notes, *De analogia linguae Graecae*.

**3.2.** At the end of 1799 Humboldt was in Madrid as part of his sojourn in Paris and his famous travels to the Basque provinces. On 20 December 1799, he wrote a letter to his friend, the German classical scholar Friedrich August Wolf (1759-1824), who had visited Leiden University in 1797, when the Greek chair was vacant. On that occasion he met Daniel Ruhkenius (1723-1798), a Hemsterhusian. In Madrid, Humboldt also met the Dutch ambassador, Johan Valckenaer (1759-1821) – "der Sohn του πάνυ," he added in his letter, i.e. the son "[d]es Berühmten", as the editor correctly annotated. Johan was the son of the distinguished Dutch classical scholar L.C. Valckenaer.

Humboldt bitterly complained about how Greek was studied in Spain:

Das Studium der alten Sprachen, besonders des Griechischen liegt hier fast gänzlich danieder. Alle Griechische Professoren auf den Universitäten wollen jetzt fast nichts sagen, und kaum findet man ein Paar besser unterrichtete Männer. Aber auch diesen ist alles Neuere unbekannt [...]. Unter den Paar Menschen, die sich hier mit diesen Dingen beschäftigen, fand ich einen, der von selbst (*Valckenaers und Lenneps Arbeiten sind gänzlich unbekannt*) auf bessere Ideen über die Grammatik gekommen war [...]. (Humboldt 1990: 200-201; emphasis added). [181]

It is clear which “Arbeiten” Humboldt referred to, for it can safely be assumed that he meant the 1790 edition of Valckenaer’s and Lennep’s lectures by Scheidius (cf. Humboldt 1990: 493-494). It should also be noted that in 1799 Humboldt appears to have appreciated the contents of these lectures (“bessere Ideen”).

His correspondent, F.A. Wolf, also appreciated them. In his lectures of 1798-1799 (cf. Stockman 1831), which show his familiarity with several of the Schola Hemsterhusiana’s publications, Wolf made the following remark about the Hemsterhuisian works on etymology (“die hemsterhuisischen Schriften über die Etymologie”):

Seine [*sc.* Hemsterhuis’] Methode, Alles auf die Stämme zurückzuführen, ist von Schultens entlehnt, der sie im Hebräischen zuerst befolgte. Das Beste aus [Albert] Schultens<sup>5</sup> findet man in der Schrift von Michaelis über die Mittel, die Bedeutungen der Wörter in ausgestorbenen Sprachen zu erforschen. *Das Ganze der hemsterhuisischen Methode hat viel Gutes, aber es gehört für die Kenner der Sprache [...]* (Stockman 1831: 103-104; emphasis added).

In Humboldt’s letter of 20 December 1799 to Wolf, we also read the following, programmatic statement:

Ich fühle, daß ich mich künftig noch ausschließender dem Sprachstudium widmen werde, und dass eine gründlich und philosophisch angestellte Vergleichung mehrerer derselben, eine Arbeit ist, der meine Schultern nach einigen Jahren ernstlichen Studiums vielleicht gewachsen seyn können (Humboldt 1990: 201).

It is not surprising to read in the literature on Humboldt that this letter, mentioning the two Dutch linguists, is often considered the “Begründungsurkunde der humboldtschen Sprachwissenschaft” (Bösch & Meßling 2004: 10).

**3.3.** In setting up and elucidating his first “*Forschungsprogramm*” (cf. Schmitter 2001), Humboldt did not forget the Schola Hemsterhusiana: this is clear from a fragment that dates from 1812, and was probably written in connection with his *Ankündigung einer Schrift über die Vaskische Sprache und Nation* (1812). The following is an interesting passage from this note:

Tiberius Hemsterhuis und die von ihm ausgegangene Schule hat zuerst für die Griechische, so wie Schultens früher für die Hebräische Sprache ein allgemeineres *System der Analogie* der Wortbildung aufgestellt. Allein auch für

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<sup>5</sup> Albert Schultens (1686-1750), a famous Dutch orientalist, friend and colleague of Tiberius Hemsterhuis.

diese Sprachen ist noch viel, und für die meisten andren noch Alles in diesem schwierigen Gebiete zu thun, auf dem man freilich oft der Gefahr ausgesetzt ist, indem man dunklen Pfaden nachspürte auf Irrwege zu gerathen (Humboldt 1907: 607; emphasis added). [182]

Here it becomes evident what Humboldt saw as a fundamental component of the doctrine of Hemsterhuis *cum suis*. Readers who are acquainted with the Schola's core ideas and remember the titles of Lennep's works, must be familiar with the term 'Analogie'. That makes it even more interesting to read in Di Cesare's paper that "dem Begriff der Analogie in Humboldts Sprachtheorie eine grundlegende Funktion zugeschrieben wird" (Di Cesare 1989: 68). All in all, we may conclude that Wilhelm von Humboldt was indeed acquainted with the writings of the Schola Hemsterhusiana.

#### 4. Some Final Remarks

**4.1.** There are several ideas that the Schola Hemsterhusiana and Humboldt have in common. One of these is the 'verb first' principle. As the Schola saw it, from an historical point of view the verb precedes the noun: "nomina a *verbis*, non *verba* a *nominibus*, primum esse formata" (Lennep 1790: 39). Humboldt (and Herder and the Dutchman Lambert ten Kate too) accord primacy and priority to the verb (cf. Stankiewicz 1974: 172-174), which is "in contrast with e.g. Condillac's view which pressed for a progress from the concrete (the noun) to the abstract (the verb)" (Morpurgo Davies 1998: 106).

**4.2.** Luhrman (2006: 72-73) pointed out that Lennep regularly used the expression *linguae forma interna*, for example, when specifying the domains in which 'analogy' is operative:

It is easy therefore to divide analogy into three parts, the *first* of which pertains to the laws of the formation of words; the *second* involves the determination of meanings, more specifically teaches in what ways *metaphorical* meanings have been derived from *proper* and *corporeal* meanings by means of various flections and forms; the *third part* finally exhibits the rules of sentence construction and the nature of phrases. Thus the first part describes the external form of the language, the second the internal form, whereas the third touches both.<sup>6</sup>

*Interna linguae forma* is a term that can also be found in the writings of Wilhelm von Humboldt: 'innere Form der Sprache'. The complex concept of 'forma interna' has a long history (cf. Wakúlenko 2005) and often refers to a form-giving, creative principle. According to Chomsky (1966: 26-27) "the [183] form of language, for Humboldt, embraces the rules of syntax and word formation as well as the sound system and the rules that determine the system of concepts that constitute the lexicon". Or, in Humboldt's own words:

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<sup>6</sup> In *tres* itaque *partes* commode dividi *analogia* potest: quarum *prima* vocabulorum formandorum leges spectat; *secunda*, in determinandis significationibus, versatur, sive docet, quibus modis a *propriis* & *corporeis* significationibus, quae verbis primitivis subjiciuntur, *metaphoricae*, per varios derivatorum flexus, & formas, profluxerint; *tertia* denique pars, construendae orationis leges, phrasumque naturam exponit. Earum partium *prima* externam linguae formam describit; *secunda* internam; *tertia* vero ad utramque pertinet (1790: 24-25).

Der Begriff der Form der Sprachen dehnt sich weit über die *Regeln der Redefügung* und selbst über die der *Wortbildung* hin aus, insofern man unter der letzteren die Anwendung gewisser allgemeiner logischer Kategorien des Wirkens, des Gewirkten, der Substanz, der Eigenschaft u.s.w. auf die Wurzeln und Grundwörter versteht. Er ist ganz eigentlich auf die *Bildung der Grundwörter* selbst anwendbar und muss in der That möglichst auf sie angewandt werden, wenn das Wesen der Sprache wahrhaft erkennbar seyn soll (Humboldt 1972: 421-422; emphasis added).<sup>7</sup>

Luhrman (2006: 73-74) is of the opinion that there is a clear parallel between the three domains mentioned by Humboldt and the tripartition put forward by Lenep.

**4.3.** Christmann, in whose historical surveys of the concept of analogy (cf. 1977, 1980, 1984) the writings of the Schola Hemsterhusiana are conspicuously absent, believes that “die Gedanken die Wilhelm von Humboldt über die Analogie äußert, eine direkte Fortsetzung der Condillacschen Lehre [sind]” (Christmann (1980: 528). Gao (2000: 27) endorses this statement without any further comment. I shall not include the controversy on the Humboldt – Condillac link here because (too) much has already been written on that topic. But it may be useful to ask why the position of the Dutch classicists *vis à vis* Humboldt has hardly ever been discussed in the extensive literature on the subject. Two possible reasons come to mind. First, it appears to be a matter of ‘poor visibility’:

the linguistics studies of these Dutch scholars were at first entirely compatible with the currents of French pragmatic rationalism [for instance, Condillac – JN], and in their further development were also greatly indebted to the same source; but the later stages in France were characterized by a stronger philosophical component and a weaker linguistic component than those in Holland (Verburg 1998 [1952]: 451).<sup>8</sup>

Second, it is possible to add the *damnatio memoriae* to which nineteenth-century German linguistic scholarship had consigned the Schola Hemsterhusiana. Consequently, Hemsterhuis and his followers are almost entirely deleted from this picture. [184]

**4.4.** To sum up, in spite of the *silentium doctum* just mentioned I am not fully convinced that Humboldt’s ‘Weg zur Sprachforschung’ (cf. Lammers 1936) owes virtually nothing to his Dutch contemporaries. Indeed, Stankiewicz, who remarked as early as 1974, that “the cross-fertilization and the convergence of ideas (extending to the very phrasing of their arguments) of the Dutch, English, and Germans in the second half of the eighteenth century should, indeed, make an exciting subject for study” (Stankiewicz 1974: 169-170) seems to have a good point.

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<sup>7</sup> Note that Lenep also mentioned the three fields listed by Humboldt as areas in which the generative principle is operative (Luhrman 2006: 73).

<sup>8</sup> Verburg (1998: 451 n.19) also emphasizes that it would be interesting “to pursue the relationship further, inasmuch the ideas derive from the same source, the branch of pragmatic rationalism which tended towards materialism”.

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